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The Question —

"Open

Communion"

And the

Episcopal Church!

A scholarly discussion by

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OPEN COMMUNION AND THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

by the

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The Issue

Does the Episcopal Church stand for "open communion?" That is to say, does she admit to the Blessed Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ all the adherents of all the sects and "isms" in Christendom, all who in some vague sense profess and call themselves Christians? Or does she insist on certain prerequisites of faith and discipline? In particular does she insist, as the Holy Catholic Church from the first ages always insisted, that one must be baptized and confirmed and be in communion with one's lawful Bishop?

Is Confirmation a prerequisite to the reception of Holy Communion in the Episcopal Church? This question would seem to be answered by the rubric at the end of the Confirmation Office. "And there shall none be admitted to the Holy Communion, until such time as he be confirmed, or be ready and desirous to be confirmed." (p. 299). Also by the rubric at the end of the Baptismal Office. "It is expedient that every Adult, thus baptized, should be confirmed by the Bishop, so soon after his Baptism as conveniently may be; that so he may be admitted to the Holy Communion." (p. 281).

To most readers these two statements would seem to be sufficient.

However, it is asserted that these rubrics do not really mean what they appear to mean; that the Rule on Confirmation is simply a domestic piece of discipline of the Episcopal Church or of the Anglican Communion, and was not intended to bind members of other religious bodies. This apparently implies that the Anglican Church recognizes a multitude of denominations of human origin, among which we are free to select one to our liking, rather than "one Catholic and Apostolic Church," founded by Christ, represented in each country by the lawful Bishops and the faithful clergy and people united with them in one faith and discipline.

What Does the Early Church Teach?

It must be remembered that neither the Church of England nor the Anglican communion ever claimed to be a self contained unit sufficient to itself, but rather to be part of the historic Catholic Church founded by Christ, and therefore committed to the faith and order of the Holy Catholic Church as a

whole. In particular Anglicans have always appealed to the undivided Church of the early centuries. Thus the preface to the English Prayer Book (1662) reads: "Of the sundry Alterations proposed unto us, we have rejected all such as were either of dangerous consequence (as secretly striking at some established Doctrine, or laudable Practice of the Church of England, or indeed of the whole Catholic Church of Christ) or else of no consequence at all."

The preface to the American Book of Common Prayer declares the firm intention of this (Episcopal) Church not to differ from the Church of England in any essential matter of doctrine, discipline or worship. Therefore, the appeal to the primitive Church made by the Church of England binds the Episcopal Church in this country as well. It becomes, therefore, a matter of great importance to ascertain what the teaching of the Catholic Church as a whole is on the subject of confirmation, and particularly the teaching of the undivided Church of the early centuries.

How do the "Catholic Fathers and Ancient Bishops" to Whom the Church of England Appeals as Authentic Interpreters of Holy Scripture (Canons of 1571) Regard Confirmation?

Do they consider it as merely an ornamental rite which may be dispensed with? And do they consider the practice of confirmation to be merely a rule of the Church which may lightly be waived? No one at all familiar with their teaching would assert this for a moment. Theophilus of Antioch, for example, writing about 180 A.D. says, "We are called Christians on this account because we are anointed with the oil of God." The reference here in all probability is to the anointing of Christians in confirmation.

Frequently confirmation is called "the seal" or "the seal of the Lord" which implies that it stands in the same relation to Christians as circumcision stood to Jews under the old covenant. It is only fair to say that the phrase, "the seal," is also applied by various Fathers to baptism, but inasmuch as baptism and confirmation were commonly administered together, and at times seem to be spoken of as one rite, there is no necessary contradiction between those Fathers who speak of baptism as "the seal," (including what we would now call confirmation, under the head of baptism,) and those who speak of the "chrism" or laying on of hands in confirmation as "the seal."

Tertullian, for instance, in his treatise on baptism, written about 200 A.D., speaks of "the hovering of

the Spirit of God over the water in creation" as a type of baptism, and likewise similarly refers to "the angel at the pool of Bethsaida (Bethesda)" and adds, with reference to baptism, that "man receives again that Spirit of God which he had first received from his breathing upon him (afflatus) but had afterward lost through sin." (Baptism, Chapter 5). However, he adds immediately "Not that in the waters we obtain the Holy Spirit, but in the water . . . we are cleansed and prepared for the Holy Spirit." He then mentions the unction with which Christians are anointed on coming out of the baptismal waters, (Chapter 6), and adds "In the next place the hand is laid on us invoking and inviting the Holy Spirit through benediction. . . . Then over our cleansed and blessed bodies willingly descends from the Father that most Holy Spirit." All of this occurs in Tertullian's treatise on Baptism, though it is quite clear that the gift of the Holy Spirit, without which one could not be a Christian, is connected with what we should now call confirmation.

The great St. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, says, "These who are baptized in the Church are presented to the prelates of the Church, that by our prayer and the laying on of the hand they may obtain the Holy Spirit." (Ep. Jubiano, 73).¹

Arguing against the validity of heretical baptism he says, "It is not enough for the hand to be laid on them for the reception of the Holy Spirit unless they also receive the baptism of the Church. For then they can be fully sanctified and be the sons of God, if they are born of each Sacrament."²

This St. Cyprian is the great martyr who taught — like all the fathers and martyrs and councils of the Church of the early centuries, that "the Church is in the Bishop, and the Bishop is in the Church and they that are not with the Bishop are not in the Church." (Epistle 67).

St. Hippolytus of Rome, writing about 217 A.D., shows that no one was admitted to Holy Communion, nor even to the Eucharistic prayers, until he had been confirmed.

"Thenceforward (that is after the confirming 'sealing',) they (the newly confirmed) shall pray together with all the people. But they shall not previously pray with the people before they have undergone all these things."³

These extracts from representative Fathers suf-

1. Qui in Ecclesia baptizantur praepositis Ecclesiae offeruntur, ut per nostram orationem ac manus impositionem Spiritum Sanctum consequantur. (Written about 250 A.D.).

2. "Parum est eis manum imponere ad recipiendum Spiritum Sanctum, nisi accipiant et ecclesiae baptismum. Tunc enim demum plene sanctificari et esse filii Dei possint, si sacramento utroque nascentur" (S. Cyp. Ep. lxxii. I).

3. "Non primum orantes cum fidelibus, nisi omnia haec fuerint consecuti." (Dix—*The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*, p. 39).

ficiently indicate the teaching of the Holy Catholic Church of the early centuries, which was reaffirmed by the Church of England at the Reformation, and which the Anglican Communion has appealed to ever since, both against the addition to the Faith of Rome and the subtractions of sectarian Protestantism.

The Church of England and the Man-Made Sects

But what was the attitude of the Church to the sects, which broke away from her in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? Did she suppose that they were free from her discipline and might be admitted to Communion on their own terms? On the contrary they were definitely excluded by the canons of 1603-04.

Canon 9. "Authors of Schisms in the Church of England censured."

"Whosoever shall hereafter separate themselves from the communion of saints, as it is approved by the apostles' rules, in the church of England, and combine themselves together in a new brotherhood, accounting the Christians who are conformable to the doctrine, government, rites, and ceremonies of the church of England to be profane and unmeet for them to join with in Christian profession, let them be excommunicated *ipso facto*, and not restored! But by the archbishop, after their repentance and public revocation of such their wicked errors."

Canon 10. "Maintainers of Schismatics in the Church of England censured."

"Whosoever shall affirm that such ministers as refuse to subscribe to the form and manner of God's worship in the church of England, prescribed in the communion book, and their adherents, may truly take unto them the name of another church, not established by law, and dare presume to publish it, that this their pretended church hath of long time groaned under the burden of certain grievances imposed upon it, and upon the members thereof before mentioned by the church of England and the orders and constitutions therein by law established; let them be excommunicated, and not restored until they repent and publicly revoke such their wicked errors."

This canon would seem to speak for itself. The Church of England and her daughter churches — including the Episcopal Church — never supposed that any man or woman could found a church as good as that founded by Christ, or that those who join such a "church" are entitled to all the most sacred privileges of membership in the Church of Christ, including Holy Communion.

Canon 11. "Maintenance of Conventicles censured."

"Whosoever shall hereafter affirm that there are within this realm other meetings, assemblies, or congregations of the king's born subjects than such as by the laws of this land are held and allowed, which may rightly challenge to themselves the name of true and lawful churches; let him be excommunicated, and not restored but by the archbishop, after his repentance and public revocation of such his wicked errors."

It is clear that "true and lawful churches" means in accordance with the law of Christ, not the law of the land. (No one could have any doubt on that score). Therefore the extension of legal toleration to Dissenters would not affect the position taken.

Canon 27. "Schismatics not to be admitted to the Communion."

"No minister, when he celebrateth the communion shall willingly administer the same to any but to such as kneel, under pain of suspension, nor under the like pain to any that refuse to be present at public prayers according to the orders of the church of England, nor to any that are common and notorious depravers of the book of common prayer and administration of the sacraments . . . except every such person shall first acknowledge to the minister, before the churchwardens, his repentance for the same, and promise by word, if he cannot write, that he will do so no more. . . ."

One can scarcely reconcile this canon with the practice of open Communion. In the light of it, now can one contend that the church invites all and sundry to her altars whether they accept her doctrine and discipline or not?

The Rubric Requiring Confirmation Before Communion

The Canons of 1604, which excluded schismatics from the Holy Communion, were reinforced by the Rubric requiring confirmation before Communion. This Rubric goes back in substance to the mediaeval Archbishop Peckham. Before 1661 it read "none shall be admitted to holy Communion until such time as he be confirmed." Since November 1661 it occurs in the Book of Common Prayer (at the end of the Office of Confirmation) in the following form — "And there shall none be admitted to the holy Communion until such time as he be confirmed, or be ready and desirous to be confirmed."

The strange suggestion has been made in some quarters⁴ that this rubric was intended to apply only

4. As by Dr. H. M. Gwatkin, "The Confirmation Rubric"; Prof. James Mueller, "The Confirmation Rubric"; and Dr. Massey H. Shepherd, Jr., "The Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary (N. Y. 1951). p. 299."

to "the church's own children," "her own members," that it was simply "a piece of domestic discipline" and was not intended to apply to separatists from the Church. The history of the rubric scarcely bears out this suggestion. No one who knows anything about the mediaeval Church of England could imagine that Archbishop Peckam was in favor not only of admitting heretics and schismatics to Communion, but admitting them on easier terms than the faithful members of the Church enjoyed. Nor can the Bishops who participated in the last legal revision of the English Prayer Book (1661-2) be thought to have had anything so preposterous in mind.

On the contrary, they added to the clause in the Litany in which the Church prayed to be delivered from all heresy and false doctrine, the phrase "and schism," words which envisaged the more orthodox Dissenters. When the Puritan divines at the Savoy Conference demanded "that Confirmation may not be made so necessary to Holy Communion as that none should be admitted to it except they be confirmed," the Bishops replied: "there is no inconvenience (i.e. unfitness) that Confirmation be required before the Communion where it may be ordinarily obtained." The only concession they made, in view of the large numbers of people who were now confirmed after the Puritan regime in England when the Church had been banned, was to add after the word "confirmed" (in the rubric), the clause "or be ready and desirous to be confirmed."

It must be remembered that the Canons of 1604 already quoted were known and enforced by the Bishops who took part in this revision of the English Prayer Book and were considered by them as being implemented by this rubric. Among others, Bishops Walton and Wren allude to this fact, as does the distinguished theologian, Thorndike, who lived at the same time, and who also took an active part in the proceedings. The Ecclesiastical Courts of the time refer to these Canons and act upon them in 1662, and the following year we find Jeremy Taylor, in the Church of Ireland, citing them in connexion with those who wished to make their communion but who were neither confirmed nor "ready and desirous to be confirmed."

Wheatley, probably the greatest liturgist the Church of England produced since the Reformation, writes in his "*A Rational Illustration of the Book of Common Prayer*."

"After this is added a rubric that *none be admitted to the holy Communion until such time as he be confirmed, or be ready and desirous to be confirmed.*" This is exactly conformable to the practice of the primitive church, which always ordered that Confirmation should precede the Eucharist, except there was extraordinary cause to the contrary: such as was

the case of Clinic Baptism, of the absence of a Bishop or the like; in which cases the Eucharist is allowed before Confirmation. The like provision (as I have already observed) is made by our provincial constitutions as well as the rubric which is now before us which admit none to communicate unless in danger of death, but such as are confirmed or at least have a reasonable impediment for not being confirmed and the Glossary allows no impediment to be reasonable, but the want of a Bishop near the place." (pp. 425f).

Wheatley mentions (p. 280) various classes of persons who are disqualified from communicating. Among these are Schismatics (here article 27 of the Canons of 1603 is referred to) and persons not confirmed. No hint is given that if a person is both unconfirmed and a schismatic, he is to be given holy Communion, as if these two negatives added up to an affirmative or as if the one impediment cancelled out the other. Such contempt for logic and common sense may pass for wisdom in the twentieth century; it did not in the seventeenth or eighteenth century.

The objection is sometimes made that the "Foreign Reformed" — European Calvinists and others — were commonly admitted to communion in the English Church without confirmation by Bishops. This is true and demands a brief explanation. English Churchmen generally made a sharp distinction between separatists in England and Scotland, who had broken away from their lawful Bishops holding the reformed Catholic faith, and the separatists in Germany, Switzerland and elsewhere on the Continent who had broken away from Bishops imposing unlawful and uncatholic terms of communion.

They supposed that these Foreign Reformed desired to secure Bishops, granting communion on true and catholic terms, but were unable to secure them. They lacked Bishops not from choice, but from "inevitable necessity" (as Hooker and Archbishop Laud express it). They were, therefore, to be considered members of the Holy Catholic Church (more specifically of a defective and ailing part of it) and might charitably be admitted to communion. They were not, like the English and Scotch schismatics, rebels against Bishops and hence rebels against Christ and His Church. The separatists in England and Scotland — Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, etc. — were under no such "inevitable necessity." They rejected Bishops (as successors of the Apostles) on principle. Their organizations were purely human societies, in revolt against the representatives of Christ in His Church. "This their pretended Church" is the way such societies are described by the Canons of 1603.

Whether the "Foreign Reformed" were actually in the dire strait of "inevitable necessity" may be doubted. As time went on, and they still failed to make any effort to secure Bishops, doubts did arise in the minds of many Churchmen. But at any rate, we can see the principle on which they acted, and it gives not the least foundation for "open communion," as understood and practised today, or for the admission of English or American sectarians to the altars of the Church. There is a great difference between guerillas, cut off from the regular army and its officers, but co-operating with them, and mutineers who have revolted without due cause against their duly appointed officers.

Few men had so much to do with the Restoration settlement, which included the last legal revision of the English Book of Common Prayer — and the rubric about Confirmation — as Peter Gunning, Bishop of Ely. He was, among other things, the author of the beautiful "prayer for all sorts and conditions of men." His chaplain, Saywell, Master of Jesus College, Cambridge, after speaking of his great sympathy and tenderness toward the Foreign Reformed, who lacked Bishops through no fault of their own, goes on to make it clear that neither he, nor the Church of England, admitted the English Separatists to communion.

"His love of truth and zeal for genuine catholic unity does teach him not to communicate with them that deny the catholic faith or break catholic unity. Such are infidels, heretics, schismatics, and openly wicked livers. . . . These the Church of England, and the Bishop of Ely taught by her, do manifestly reject from their communion. . . . All those who set up altar against altar, and hold separate congregations, contrary to the law of this church, are to be held as schismatics, and were condemned as such by the ancient general and particular councils and all the catholic fathers and martyrs, and thought not fit to be received into Christian communion or accounted lively members of the catholic church. Such therefore the Church of England and the Lord Bishop of Ely reject from their communion."⁵ This testimony, dating from 1682, only twenty years from the revision of the Prayer Book (including the Confirmation Rubric) is decisive as to what the church meant by it, and as to whom it applied.

"Occasional Conformity"

A great deal has been made by some writers (e.g. Professor Mueller) of the practice of occasional conformity. It is objected that the law compelled all persons who were office holders to receive the Sacrament from time to time at the hands of a clergyman

5. *Evangelical and Catholic Unity*, p. 317f.

of the Church of England, while at the same time many of these had not been confirmed and had no intention of being confirmed. Accordingly many non-conformists received the Sacrament from time to time in the English Church in order to qualify for public office. Some clergymen of the established Church approved of this practice and others connived at it. But Wheatley's argument against admitting those otherwise disqualified seems to cover this objection also. He writes:

"But here again it has been objected, that 'all persons, before they are admitted into any office, are obliged by our laws to receive the Sacrament as a *Qualification*; consequently that the Minister is obliged by the same laws to admit any person that offers himself upon this occasion, to the holy Communion, however unfit he may have rendered himself by his life and actions.' But in answer to this, it must be considered, that the power which Christ himself invested his church with, of admitting persons into her Communion, and excluding them from it, is what no human laws can deprive her of. And therefore when the laws require men to receive this holy Sacrament to qualify themselves for offices, they always suppose that they must first qualify themselves according to the holy laws of the church, which are founded on those of the Gospel. So that it would be a very great injury to our legislators (as being a very uncharitable opinion of them) to imagine, that if an unbaptized, or excommunicate person, a Deist, or notorious sinner, should happen to obtain an office, that they intend to oblige the church to admit persons, under these bad dispositions, to be partakers of the Blessed Eucharist." (*A Rational Illustration of the Book of Common Prayer*, by Wheatley, pp. 278-279, American Edition, Boston, 1825.)

Wheatley does not in this passage directly have confirmation in view, though elsewhere as we have seen, he presupposes this as a prerequisite (p. 280). But the principle as he states it would cover the necessity of confirmation as a prerequisite to holy communion, whatever the civil power might decree.

Of course not all nonconformists who desired to receive the Blessed Sacrament at the Altars of the church did so from a political motive. Where higher motives entered in, some churchmen welcomed their approach, feeling that it was better for them to receive at the altars of the church from time to time than not at all. By receiving the Holy Communion in the English Church they were admitting that the church did not impose sinful terms of communion — a contention which the earlier Dissenters had made, and which alone would justify their separation from the church. They considered that this occasional conformity was the best they could hope for at the time,

and that the Dissenters might be led on from occasional conformity to constant membership in the church. They might be gradually weaned from their errors and schisms. The attitude of these churchmen was thus entirely different from that of those who practice open communion at the present day. Their point of view is exemplified in some of the facts published under the title of *London Cases*.⁶

Tenison (who later became Archbishop of Canterbury), although he belonged to the Liberal or Latitudinarian wing of the English church, was by no means satisfied with this occasional conformity and tolerates it only as a step to something better.

"For peace sake, let that be more constant, in which your conscience alloweth occasional exercise. A member who joins himself to any established church, and also to any churches which are set up, not as legal supplements of it but as forts against it, seems to be a kind of wooden leg, if I may represent so grave a matter by so light a similitude. He is tied on and taken off at pleasure; he is not as by natural ligaments and nerves knit to such ecclesiastical bodies. If all would do constantly what they can in conscience do sometimes, they would create a better opinion of themselves . . . and hinder all the destructive breaches amongst us."⁷

Other Anglican writers of the same day are less favorable to occasional conformity than Tenison. For example, Cave writes:

". . . I beseech our dissenting or rather inconstant brethren to reason a little. If our communion be sinful, why did they enter into it? If it be lawful, why do they forsake it?"⁸

It is clear that Cave, learned scholar that he was, shared the view of the great majority of Christians of all ages, that the act of communion was an "entering" of the body with which one communicated and the return to another Church or sect was a "forsaking" of it.

The opinion of Grove, who later became Bishop of Chichester, is similar to that of Cave. He writes:

"If it were lawful for them to communicate with us once, it must be lawful for them to do so still; and they will not refuse to submit to authority in all things that may lawfully be done. I cannot therefore see how they can avoid being self-condemned, if they should forsake our communion; for if they judged it unlawful, they sinned wilfully when they entered into it; if they think it lawful, they would then sin in withdrawing from it."⁹

6. *A Collection of Cases and other Discourses lately written to recover Dissenters to the Communion of the Church of England*, by some Divines of the City of London. Third Edition. 1698. Cited by A. J. Mason, *The Church of England and Episcopacy*, p. 545. Cambridge University Press, 1914.

7. T. Tenison *Argument for Union* (1683), pp. 41 foll.; *London Cases* 3rd ed., p. 493. Cited by A. J. Mason, op. cit. p. 546.

8. *London Cases*, p. 501. Cited by A. J. Mason, op. cit. p. 547.

9. *London Cases*, p. 2. Cited by A. J. Mason, op. cit. p. 547.

Sherlock

William Sherlock (likewise writing in the *London Cases*) sharply condemns the practice of making one's communion "sometimes in the church, sometimes in a sect separated from her.

"Now if schism be an innocent thing, and the true catholic spirit I have no more to say, but that the whole Christian church ever since the apostles' times has been in a very great mistake; but if schism be a very great sin, and that which will damn us as soon as adultery and murder, then it must needs be a dangerous thing to communicate with schismatics. The sum of all in short is this. Besides those men who justify their separation from the church of England by charging her with requiring sinful terms of communion (which is the only thing that can justify their separation, if it could be proved), there are others who separate lightly and wantonly, for want of a due sense of the nature of church communion and our obligations to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. They have no notion at all of a church, or no notion of one church, or know not wherein the unity and communion of this church consists; and these men think it is indifferent whether they communicate with any church at all, or that they secure themselves from schism by communicating sometimes with one church and sometimes with another; that they may choose their church according to their own fancies, and change again whenever their humour alters. . . ."

These words deserve to be carefully weighed and pondered at the present day.

Nor did loyal and consistent churchmen cease to condemn the practice of "occasional conformity" though the decay of church discipline in the eighteenth century and later made it easy to connive at the practice.

Sikes

Thomas Sikes, in his *Discourse on Parochial Communion* (published 1812) has some plain words on the subject:

"The occasional communicant at the meeting house is necessarily only an occasional communicant at the church. Communion is a habit; and that which breaks the habit, breaks communion. Whatever is only occasional is not communion, and whatever is communion is not occasional. We should think it rather strange in a man professing his regard for humility or for chastity to talk of occasional pride, or occasional whoredom; for these virtues are habits, and whatever destroys the habit . . . destroys the virtue. Occasional pride destroys humility; occasional whoredom destroys chastity; occasional schism destroys communion. The occasional communicant is

such an amphibious religionist as cannot, by the principles of church communion, be considered as a churchman. . . . Occasional communion . . . has been . . . peculiar to our separatists; a practice always much opposed by the churchmen, and considered by them as disgraceful and indefensible." (p. 379).

Thus, even after the laxity of the eighteenth century, and a generation before the Catholic Revival had begun at Oxford, loyal churchmen were combatting the practice as "disgraceful and indefensible." Opposition to it did not begin with the Oxford Movement, as is often (absurdly) claimed. It was the traditional position of the Anglican Church, that "if 'occasional conformity' be lawful, constant conformity is a duty" (Brett).

Does the Legal Toleration of Dissenters Change the Church's Position?

A further objection to the position taken in this paper has been raised in recent years. It is admitted that the Church of England repudiated non-episcopal ministries and Sacraments in England and Scotland, but she recognized them (it is said) in the non-episcopal churches of Europe. (This is not quite accurate. The Church of England never actually recognized such ministries and sacraments, but refrained from condemning them, when and if they were due to "inevitable necessity"). But at that time, the Church of England was not only the established church, but the only church tolerated by the law of the land. The legal toleration extended to Dissenters in 1688 has (it is contended) changed all this, and Anglicans should recognize sectarian ministries and sacraments at home as well as abroad, and practice intercommunion!¹⁰

It is difficult to take this argument seriously — at least, if one believes that the church owes her existence and authority to the Christ of God and not to the civil power. It is the worst type of Erastianism — the enslaving of the church to kings and princes which is so definitely rejected in the Thirty-nine Articles (Art. 37).

One fact alone is sufficient to dispose of this line of reasoning. In 1714, a generation after legal toleration had been extended to the Dissenting sects, the Convocation of the Church of England drew up and authorized an office for the reconciliation of penitents returning from the Church of Rome or from "the separation." The lesson tells of the joy of the Shepherd on recovering His lost sheep. Psalm 122 is read which begins with the words, "I was glad

10. These arguments have been ably summarized by the distinguished Oxford professor and theologian, the Rev. Leonard Hodgson in "The Church Quarterly Review."

when they said unto me: we will go into the house of the Lord," and contains the verse, "Jerusalem is built as a city that is at unity in itself."

The bishop or priest examines the penitent as to his acceptance of the Scriptures and the Apostles' Creed and continues:

(Question): Art thou truly sorrowful that thou has not followed the way prescribed in these scriptures for the directing of the faith and practice of a true disciple of Christ Jesus?

(Answer): I am heartily sorry, and I hope for mercy through Jesus Christ.

The further question is asked: "Dost thou allow and approve of the orders of bishops, priests, and deacons" — adding, if the penitent has been a teacher in some separate congregation, "as what have been in the church of Christ from the time of the apostles — and wilt thou as much as in thee lieth, promote all due regard to the same good order and government of the church of Christ?"

It should be noted that the three orders of the Church's ministry are to be accepted on the ground of apostolic origin and not of legal establishment.

If the penitent is one who formerly was in communion with the church and has lapsed, the question is asked:

"Art thou heartily sorry that when thou wast in the way of truth, thou didst so little watch over thy own heart, as to suffer thyself to be led away with the shows of vain doctrine? and dost thou steadfastly purpose to be more careful for the future, and to persevere in that holy profession, which thou has now made?"

After the humble reply in the affirmative, absolution was given from the guilt of schism and the office concluded with prayers and an exhortation to perseverance.¹¹

Thus after legal toleration has become a fact, and substantially the modern situation had developed a multitude of sects apparently here to stay — the church's attitude toward schism was unchanged. She regarded it still as a deadly sin requiring special confession and absolution and reconciliation to the church.

The 1930 Lambeth Conference and the General Communion Service at Oxford (1937)

Those Anglicans who favor open communion frequently appeal to the General Communion Service held at Oxford on the occasion of the Universal Christian Council of Life and Work in the summer of 1937. The reference is to the invitation to all the

11. Cardwell, *Synodalia*, Vol. 2. pp. 796.

delegated attending the "Life and Work" Conference to receive the holy communion at the Eucharist celebrated by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Those at the Conference who arranged this General Communion Service appealed to Article 42 of the Lambeth Conference of 1930 and the Resolution of the Upper House of Canterbury Convocation in January, 1933. The Resolution of the Lambeth Conference — and it must be remembered that a Lambeth Conference is not a Synod and has no legislative power but only advisory — reads as follows:

"The Bishops of the Anglican Communion will not question the action of any Bishop who . . . may give permission that baptized communicant members of Churches not in communion with our own should be encouraged to communicate in Anglican churches, when the ministrations of their own Church are not available, or in other special or temporary circumstances." (*Lambeth Conference, 1930, London, S.P.C.K. p. 52*).

It is to be noted that this piece of advice — it is no more than that — of the 1930 Lambeth Conference is carefully hedged in and qualified, and does not presume that open communion in general is permissible — rather it implies the opposite. It contemplates a very exceptional state of affairs. Whether even this exception is legitimate and in accordance with Anglican and Catholic principles is very dubious. But certainly it does not endorse the general practice of open communion.

So far as I know the only attempt to implement this Advisory Resolution of the Lambeth Conference which could have any bearing on the General Communion at Oxford in 1937 was the Resolution adopted on January 18, 1933, by the Upper House of the Canterbury Convocation, which reads as follows:

"On special occasions, if and when they arise, when groups of members of the Church of England and of other Christian denominations are joined together in efforts definitely intended to promote the visible unity of the Church of Christ, the Bishop, if requested, may approve of the admission of baptised communicant members of these other denominations to Holy Communion according to the Anglican rite." (*Christian Unity The Anglican Position, p. 172, G.K.A. Bell, Bishop of Chichester, London, Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd. 1948*).

The announcement of the Conference Bulletin was as follows:

"A celebration of Holy Communion according to the Anglican rite will be held on Sunday, July 25th, at 8 a.m. It is intended as a service for Delegates to the Oxford Conference, and those accompanying them. It is hoped that not only such

of them as are members of the Anglican Church, but also others who are Baptised Communicants in their own Churches may come to the Service and partake of Holy Communion." (op. cit. p. 172).

It is worth noting in passing that the Resolution of the Upper House of Canterbury was not passed by the Lower House and therefore was not adopted by Convocation itself. The fact that it was necessary to secure the approval of Convocation and to introduce such a Resolution shows that the Canon Law of the Church of England did not permit a general communion even in the exceptional circumstances contemplated. The fact that the Lower House did not pass the Resolution leaves the matter exactly where it was.

Furthermore this Resolution of the Upper House of Canterbury, like that of the Lambeth Conference, does not in any way endorse open communion under ordinary circumstances. It contemplates a very exceptional state of affairs. Even this exception is contrary to the formularies of the Anglican communion and to historic Catholic principles. But that is not the point I am making here. It does not afford the least precedent for the kind of open communion that is advocated and practiced in some quarters today.

Incidentally, it is likely that this General Communion at Oxford, far from promoting Church unity, had the opposite effect. It disgusted the Orthodox Eastern delegates at the Conference — and it must be remembered that the Orthodox Eastern Churches comprise practically one-half of non-Roman Christendom. This writer well remembers a conversation at Oxford, immediately after the announcement of the General Communion Service, with Father Sergei Boulgakoff, the distinguished Russian theologian and Dean of the Russian Theological Seminary in Paris. Fr. Boulgakoff, who was one of the most tireless workers for reunion between the Orthodox and Anglican Churches, was almost in despair. He knew how it would set back the cause of reunion between the two great churches, which was so dear to his heart, and lamented the evident lack of a "living tradition" among Anglicans. The distinguished Dean of the Greek Church in London, Dr. Constantinides, was equally outspoken. He has since become Archbishop¹² of the Greek Orthodox Church in North and South America, and lately voiced his vigorous disapproval of the Ecumenical Movement as now conducted.

It is possible that such general communions might facilitate the union of the Anglican Church with some of the Protestant bodies of dubious orthodoxy. They do nothing to promote Catholic unity or union with those of the Lutheran tradition. In fact the

12. Archbishop Michael.

General Communion at Oxford was on the whole a setback to Christian unity, and we are still suffering from the effect of such actions as this. Yet the terms of the invitation at the Oxford Conference were very far, as we have seen, from constituting a blanket endorsement of open communion under ordinary circumstances. Similarly, its suggestion that Christians temporarily cut off from the ministrations of their own church, might with the consent of the Bishop of the diocese, be admitted to communicate at our altars is (whatever we think of the suggestion) very far from an endorsement of indiscriminate open communion.

On the contrary, the Lambeth Conferences have constantly reiterated the Anglican appeal to the early church. The Declaration on Unity of the American Episcopal Bishops in 1886, faithfully reproduces the age long tradition of Anglicanism: "We do hereby affirm that the Christian unity now so earnestly desired . . . can be restored only by the return of all Christian Communions to the principles of unity exemplified by the undivided Catholic Church during the first ages of its existence; which principles we believe to be the substantial deposit of Christian Faith and Order committed by Christ and His Apostles to the Church unto the end of the world, and therefore incapable of compromise or surrender." These principles of unity, as we have seen, are at the opposite pole from open communion.

It would be impossible in a short paper like this to deal with all the arguments advanced for open communion. Perhaps a word should be said of one recently put forward that the invitation in the Communion Service itself: "Ye who do truly and earnestly repent," etc., speaks only of repentance and charity and says nothing of Confirmation. This argument proves far too much. The invitation says nothing of Baptism or even faith in Christ. These and other things like Confirmation are presupposed, being dealt with elsewhere in the Prayer Book. The invitation is addressed to instructed members of the Church, not to a heterogeneous aggregation of mankind.

Summary

We have examined the evidence as to the Church's stand on open communion and in particular as to the meaning of the Church's Rubric demanding Confirmation, or the readiness to receive Confirmation, as a prerequisite to Holy Communion. We have seen that the claim that this is simply a domestic piece of legislation intended only for Episcopalians is baseless. We have seen the tremendous importance of Confirmation in the thought and life of the church, and more particularly of the Early Church, to which the Church of England and the whole

Anglican Communion have steadfastly appealed. We have seen that it was considered no mere ornamental adjunct but an essential of the Christian life, at least in the case of adult Christians to whom it was available. We have seen that the English Bishops at the final revision of the Prayer Book in 1662 considered the case of non conformists and yet refused to waive the necessity of confirmation or to make any other concession than that those "ready and desirous to be confirmed" might be admitted to Holy Communion.

We have considered the objections commonly put forward, and in particular the exceptions in practice, to which attention has been called, e.g. the practice of occasional conformity in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, the admission of members of the Foreign Reformed churches and occasional invitations to non-conformists to receive during the nineteenth century or later. We have seen that typical supporters of the practice urged it as a means of recovering Dissenters to the church, not as a recognition of the legitimacy of their position (which open communion today commonly implies). We have seen that consistent churchmen constantly attacked the practice as "disgraceful and indefensible." The church herself never approved the practice, and by her Office for the reconciliation of Separatists (1714), showed that her attitude toward schism was unchanged. Nor do the recommendations of Lambeth — dubious as some of them are — amount to an endorsement of open communion.

Conclusion

Open communion, in the sense of admission to (the reception of) the Blessed Sacrament of members of denominations lacking the Episcopate and the Priesthood, is utterly opposed to the mind and practice of the undivided Church of the first centuries, to which Anglicanism has constantly and formally appealed and still appeals. Those who take their stand upon the historic principles of the Anglican Communion oppose it because:

1) Union with one's Bishop, and with the Priests and Deacons under him, is an essential condition of membership in the Catholic Church, in the full sense of the word. It is true that in a strictly limited and qualified sense all validly baptized persons, who have not been cut off from the Church or cut themselves off from her (by heresy, schism, etc.,) may, according to an opinion wide-spread in the Western Church, be considered members of the Church. But it is also true that for full or normal membership,¹³

13. Baptism, even when received at the hands of a duly ordained minister of the Church, does not entitle one forthwith to all privileges of the Church (e.g. to be ordained Priest or consecrated Bishop, etc.).

union with the Bishops and other lawful pastors is essential. "The Church is in the Bishop, and the Bishop is in the Church, and they that are not with the Bishop are not in the Church." These words of Cyprian well sum up the doctrines of the undivided Church, which is that of Anglicanism. So does his well-known definition, of the church as a people united to their priest (Bishop) and a flock adhering to their shepherd (Ep. 67). And the most sacred privileges of the Church, can be extended only to (full) members of the Church, owing her authority and living her life.

2) Confirmation or the laying on hands to secure the gift of the Holy Spirit, is rightly demanded as a prerequisite to Holy Communion. This rite is, in the New Testament, considered one of the six "first principles of the doctrine of Christ," (Hebrews vi., 1, 2, and 4) and in the undivided Church Confirmation was invariably insisted on before Communion, in all normal circumstances, though the alternative method of anointing by a Bishop or by a Priest with Chrism blessed by the Bishop might be employed. This rite is a sort of ordination to the royal priesthood of the laity, the highest function of which is participation in the Holy Communion. It is, in fact, part of the initiation into the Christian life, scarcely less important than Baptism, which is incomplete without it. The Anglican Church, after 1660, did indeed modify the rule so far as to admit people who were "ready and desirous to be confirmed." The reception of the Blessed Sacrament by people who have not been confirmed, and have not the slightest desire or intention of being confirmed, is a most serious breach of the Catholic order.

3) The methods of Baptism employed by many ministers of various sects are at least very doubtful. Some admit to their Communion without any sort of Baptism.

4) Sacramental unity presupposes unity of faith. The Church insists on her baptized children being taught the Creed and "all other things which a Christian ought to know and believe to his soul's health," as embodied in her Catechism, her prayers, her liturgy, etc. But much of this teaching, the members of the dissident sects reject. Basic differences exist as to the Holy Catholic Church, the Ministry, the Sacraments, etc. In some of the sects, acceptance of even the most elementary Christian truths about God and Christ can no longer be assumed. The greatest differences exist as to the meaning of the Holy Communion itself, differences which are excluded by those who accept the Church's rule of faith — Scripture and the teaching of "the Catholic Fathers and ancient Bishops" (Canons of 1571), but not for others. To admit to Holy Communion members of denominations which do not discern or

distinguish the Lord's Body, which even deny that His Body is there is discern, is most perilous to the souls in question. Moreover the Anglican Church differs from the sects not only in particular articles of the faith, but as to the very bases of the Faith itself. She asserts that "the Church hath authority in controversies of faith," they deny this; she holds to Scripture and Tradition, they to Scripture alone. Sacramental unity is, in any case, an expression of a unity of faith already existing. That this unity of faith does not exist is the presupposition of the Faith and Order Movement. When it has been achieved, then and then only, can sacramental intercommunion be rightly and fruitfully established.

5) The admission to Holy Communion of persons who are not united to their lawful Bishops and Priests, who are not confirmed and have no intention of being confirmed, who reject various articles of the Catholic Faith, would widen immeasurably the gulf between us and the Roman Catholic Church (which is nearly half of Christendom), would overthrow all possibility of union with the Orthodox Eastern Churches (another one-fourth of Christendom), would alienate many of the more orthodox Protestants (especially many Lutherans who set a high estimate on unity of faith), and would be of dubious value in drawing us nearer the remaining fragments of Christendom. It would also involve the risk, or rather the certainty, of division among ourselves.

For these reasons, open communion, whether practised every week or every five years, in a parish Church or at an ecumenical meeting of Faith and Order or Life and Work, is to be deprecated. It will not heal but will aggravate the wounds of the Body of Christ. Unsatisfactory as the present situation is, it simply reflects the unsatisfactory state of a divided Christendom. The pain which we feel at being separated from our Christian brothers at the Lord's Table is a most powerful impetus to go to the root of the difficulties — not to hide the symptoms, but to heal the disease — and to dedicate ourselves to the hard work of seeking a real, not a fictitious unity — a unity which will not be a harmony of discords, but a symphony of faith and love.